



# On The Beat

Minneapolis VA Health Care System  
January/February 2012

## Mission:

Honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional healthcare that improves their health and well being.

## Vision:

To be a patient-centered, integrated health care organization for Veterans providing excellent health care, research and education.

## VA Core Values:

- Integrity
- Commitment
- Advocacy
- Respect
- Excellence

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[www.facebook.com/VA Minneapolis](http://www.facebook.com/VA_Minneapolis)



## Dr. Mike Armstrong, PM&R Chief, Named Supervisor of the Year

Michael Armstrong, MD, Chief of the Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Service, has been named Supervisor of the Year by the Minneapolis VA Health Care System. The award, sponsored every other year through the Workforce Engagement Council to recognize an outstanding Minneapolis VA leader, was presented by Acting Director Barry Sharp at the medical center leadership meeting on Feb. 16.



Dr. Armstrong currently supervises 18 PM&R staff members who, in turn, supervise more than 100 employees. Here are some comments from his staff who nominated him for the honor:

“Dr. Armstrong has created a leadership structure that allows all employees to have a voice in the day to day issues. He views the department as a whole, keeping the department’s vision and mission at the forefront of his decisions. He has transformed the culture of the department to utilize objective data and outcomes in tracking performance and holding employees accountable to these standards.”

“He is an extremely effective communicator, respecting different points of view and handling situations with a calm demeanor. He is respectful, fair and supportive, but direct in discussing what needs to be done in order to meet goals effectively.”

“He maintains an open door policy and guides staff to reframe situations, developing creative approaches for change. He has a gift for seeing the complexities of an issue, knowing what can and can’t be done within the existing system.”

“He has guided the department into creating a comprehensive Strategic Plan that will proactively drive the department’s growth over the next 3-5 years. “

“Dr. Armstrong acknowledges and rewards employee accomplishments as evidenced by the creation of the PM&R “Employee of the Month” award as well as advocating the use of spot cash awards and time off awards in a fair and consistent way. He empowers everyone to achieve their best and supports career development.”

**SEE PAGE 8 FOR OTHER SUPERVISORS NOMINATED FOR THIS AWARD**

# **VA Dietitians Help Patients Thrive**



**BACK (L to R):** Tonia Dockt999er, Rich Flores, Kim Bihm, Heidi Hoover, Alex Shepp, Jessica Burgstahler, Cheryl Thompson;  
**MIDDLE:** Mirna Martinez, Jackie Costabilo, Dan Greenwood, Rebecca Rudquist, Samantha Malloy; **FRONT:** Kori Wilber, Nancy Dobbins, Olga Brusilovsky; **Not pictured:** Karen Lis.

**by Jessica Burgstahler MS, RD, LD**

What can a dietitian do for our patients? On a typical day at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System, you may see a dietitian encouraging a patient to drink their Boost® or talking to a patient about ways to lower their cholesterol. However, their role is much more complex and challenging.

The basement of the Minneapolis VA is home to the Nutrition & Food Services (NFS) department, which includes a trained staff of dietitians who together comprise more than 220 years of experience. The staff includes 16 dietitians (5 administrative & 11 clinical dietitians), 1 diet tech, 6 dietetic interns, and several student volunteers.

All of our dietitians have a four-year bachelor's degree followed by a year's worth of experience as a dietetic intern. However, many dietitians on staff have decided to pursue further education. Six have obtained their master's degree and two are currently working toward their masters.

Others on staff have obtained certifications as a Certified Diabetes Educator, Certified Nutrition Support Specialist & Certified Specialist in Renal Nutrition.

**CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**



# VA Nutrition & Food Service Staff

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Dietitians reach out to veteran patients on a daily basis through numerous outpatient clinics and inpatient settings. They not only work together with the food service staff to provide healthy meals to

patients, but also advise and educate patients on achieving an optimal level of nutrition corresponding to their medical condition(s). Medical conditions may include cancer, dysphasia, obesity, low body weight, pressure ulcers, stroke, diabetes, brain and spinal cord injuries or kidney, heart, gastrointestinal and liver diseases.

VA dietitians reach out to patients in the community as well. They regularly travel off-site to the Maplewood and Ramsey CBOC, Adult Day Healthcare (ADHC) site, as well as to patient homes through the Home Based Primary Care (HBPC) program. Other services include our weekend coverage, telemedicine program and “same day” appointment service, available to outpatients who may be at the VA for an appointment and realize the need to see a dietitian the same day.

A dietitian is much more than a glorified waitress or the person who orders snacks for patients. They are indispensable providers of food and nutrition services and encourage patients to live healthier lives. So next time you see one, ask yourself: What can a dietitian do for your patient? If your patient would benefit from a visit by a dietitian, please send a nutrition consult found under the consults tab in CPRS.

“I am incredibly lucky to have such a dedicated, professional and knowledgeable group of dietetic professionals who put the patients’ nutritional health at the forefront of the work they do,” said NFS Director Tonya Dockter. “Our dietitians and diet techs work both the inpatient units and with our outpatients and homebound patients. The Clinical Manager has been working diligently with the RDs to enhance our availability and focus in the PACT teams. We are partnering with pharmacy, nurses and physicians as part of PACT, telehealth and newly formed Shared Medical Appointments (SMAs).”

## Various Roles of a Minneapolis VA Dietitian

- Works with patients receiving nutrition support
- Participates in family conferences
- Attends wound care meetings
- Conducts classes on blood glucose monitoring and insulin injections.
- Creates education materials
- Finds ways to help patients eat to help with healing and repletion before and after surgeries
- Researches innovations to move the profession forward
- Performs sanitation inspections
- Educates staff on food safety and infection control topics
- Teaches diabetes, renal, cardiac or MOVE weight loss classes
- Places \$11,000 food order to feed 220 patients 3 meals every day
- Helps patients receive the meals/food they need at home through community services
- Leads the Nutrition Support Team
- Trains dietetic interns
- Coordinates the MOVE weight loss program for veterans
- Conducts patient oral evaluations on CLC (Community Living Center)
- Supervises the production and delivery of over 280,120 meals per year

# VA Employee Guide to Social Media

The main thing VA employees need to remember about blogs and social networking sites is that the same basic policies apply in these spaces as in other areas of work and life. The purpose of this guide is to help employees understand how VA policies apply to these newer technologies for communication, so you can participate with confidence. VA Directive 6515 outlines the use of Social Media as a VA employee. The following tips apply to both at work and at home.

1. **Follow all current VA policies, rules and regulations.** For example, you must not share confidential government information and you must maintain patient privacy.
2. **Only Public Affairs or designees are authorized to speak for VA.** Employees must not state or infer that their communications represent VA's position. It is permissible to include the fact that you are a VA employee on your Facebook "info" page or other "about you" pages; you should not, however, make statements that would lead people to believe you are speaking for VA in your postings.
3. **Employees expressing opinions on social media sites should make it clear that it is their personal opinion only.** Try including a disclaimer such as, "This is the view of myself as an individual and does not represent my employer." Or, more simply, say "In my personal opinion..."
4. **Use good judgment and strive for accuracy in your communications.**
5. **Be respectful and professional.** Keep in mind that your association with the VA can usually be found out. Ensure that your profile and any related content are consistent with how you wish to present yourself to colleagues or the general public.
6. **Ensure that your use of social networking activity does not interfere with your work commitments.** VA Directive 6001 outlines personal use of VA equipment (i.e. computers).
7. **Protect your privacy.** Learn how to use privacy settings on social networking sites to keep your personal life personal. Remember, social media sites are prime targets for people wishing to do harm with things such as computer viruses or other malware.
8. **Remember that you are responsible for your communications on-line.** Employees who post any information through a personal website, blog, social media, or any other means of online communication are held fully responsible for the information posted on-line. If employees post information that violates federal guidelines, ethical authorities or standards of conduct, action could result in the employee being counseled or even disciplined.

For questions, contact Jason Rolfe, web content manager, at 612 467-3240.





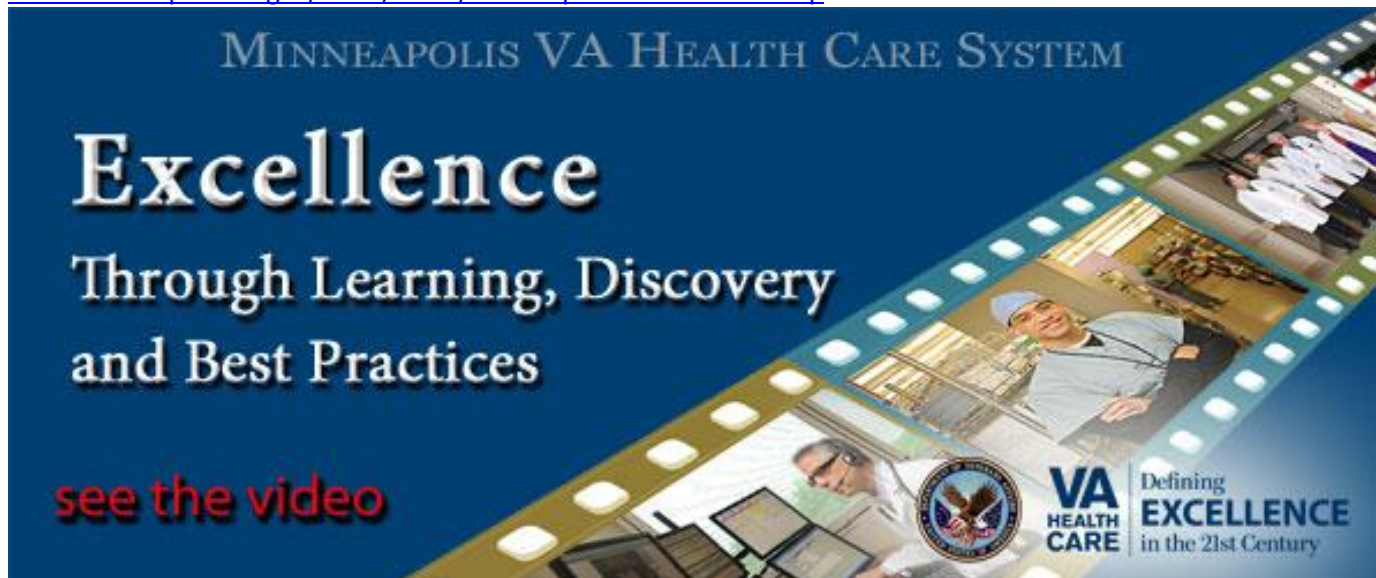
## Career Milestones – Congratulations!

<b>45 YEARS</b> Michael Owen Geraldine Kee	Susan Hammes Bruce R. Carlson Nancy G. Brokke Kenneth B. Parsley Deborah A. Hendrickson Helen V. Pearlman Dr. Kristin L. Nichol	Douglas H. Hanson Cynthia J. Loges Brenda A. Thooft Richard P. Bailey Kurt E. Thielen Todd M. Pond Rhonda J. Graham Diane M. Sullivan	<b>15 YEARS</b> Lizzette Gouge-Johnson Kristofer Wallman Cynthia A. Doolittle Melba J. Armstead Darrel L. Leach
<b>40 YEARS</b> Gerhard Johnson			
<b>35 YEARS</b> Brenda Carpenter Richard Dawson Kevin Brager Janice M.O. Anderson Dianne A. McMurray Rick S. Encinas	<b>25 YEARS</b> Indulis R. Rutks Janet Lalonde Dennis Kern Georgie Zwakman Lynn Stackpole Dr. Gary Goldish Jodi Patterson Cheryl Batson Russell Bacon Lori A. Barker	<b>20 YEARS</b> Laurie Lacina Gerald Boissonault Carol A. Densmore Chau L. Huynh Gregory A. Opitz John P. Moore Janette R. Savidge Elizabeth A. Wong	<b>10 YEARS</b> Dr. Bruce Templeton Marnie Roiger Sean Murray Ingrida Gulbis-Olsen Dhondup Dorjee Deanne Pavel Elizabeth A Peterson Scott M. Lewis Nathan A. Milender Jennifer K. Sauck
<b>30 YEARS</b> Carol Stevens Kristi Olivera Michael Mortenson			

### New Minneapolis VA Video Available for Staff Outreach Use

A 15-minute video, "Minneapolis VA Health Care System: Excellence through Learning, Discovery and Best Practices," is available for staff to use when they present before academic, community and veteran groups. Produced by the Minneapolis VA's Academic Excellence Council and Medical Media, the video illustrates the intersection of patient care, education and research. Copies available in Medical Media and Public Affairs Office. It is posted on the Internet at:

[www.minneapolis.va.gov/news/video/MinneapolisVAExcellence.asp](http://www.minneapolis.va.gov/news/video/MinneapolisVAExcellence.asp)



### Screening by Primary-Care MDs May Spot Dementia



Routine screening at primary care clinics led to a two- to threefold increase in diagnoses of brain-function impairments such as dementia in older veterans, researchers say. The new study, published in the February issue of the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, included more than 8,000 U.S. veterans aged 70 and older who agreed to undergo a brief screening during a routine visit to a VA primary care clinic. None of the veterans showed signs of memory loss.

**Dr. McCarten** Of the 2,081 (26 percent) who failed the screening, 580 (28%) agreed to further evaluation. Of those, 93% were found to have brain-function impairment, including 75 percent with dementia. This type of mental decline, known as "cognitive" impairment, causes a reduction in skills such as memory, learning and thinking beyond what's expected with normal aging. researchers noted that 118 patients who passed the initial screening requested further evaluation, and 87% were found to have some mental decline, including 70% with dementia.

"Our study demonstrates that proactive strategies such as routine screening are well-accepted and effective in diagnosing cognitive impairment, and that primary care providers value the diagnostic and management services involved," noted study leader **Dr. J. Riley McCarten**, of the Minneapolis VA Health Care System and the University of Minnesota, in a journal news release. "This project has implications for strategies that seek to improve care and contain costs in dementia," McCarten added.

The study findings contradict the current standard recommendations by the American College of Physicians, U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, and Alzheimer's Association. They discourage routine screening for dementia on all older patients at a certain age. Screening is only recommended if a patient sees a doctor about some type of problem that could be due to dementia.

### Veterans with PTSD and traumatic brain injury benefit from prolonged exposure therapy

In a small pilot study at the Tampa and Minneapolis VA medical centers, Veterans with PTSD plus mild to moderate TBI showed substantial benefit from prolonged exposure therapy. The treatment is one of two types of psychotherapy used widely in VA to treat PTSD, but some clinicians have been reluctant to use it for PTSD patients who also have TBI. One concern is that these Veterans may be less able to tolerate the distress associated with exposure therapy, in which patients emotionally relive their traumas in a safe, controlled manner. Another concern is that the patients' cognitive limitations might render the therapy less effective. But in the study, which involved 10 Veterans, the therapy was "highly effective in reducing the symptoms of PTSD," write the authors. They note that only a few modifications were needed—such as the use of electronic calendars and smartphones as memory aids, and additional session time or follow-up phone calls. But the authors say these changes are helpful even for those with PTSD but no history of TBI, as these patients often experience anxiety and tenseness that can make them distractible and forgetful. (*Journal of Head Trauma Rehabilitation*, January 2012) **Dr. Thad Strom and Shannon Kehle** of Minneapolis VA are co-authors of the paper. **ARTICLE REPRINTED FROM VA RESEARCH CURRENTS; PHOTO BY JOHN BRADLEY**



# VA Scientists Study How Our Brains Age

By **Jessica Mador**, Minnesota Public Radio

What makes us age? How does aging affect the brain? A first of its kind study aims to answer these questions and uncover why some brains are more resilient than others.

At the Minneapolis VA Brain Sciences Center, **Dr. Apostolos Georgopoulos** is leading a study of healthy brain function which over time will establish a baseline to better understand and predict disease. The goal is to build the first known database on healthy aging brains in the world. Right now, there's no other study like it.

**Georgopoulos** and other researchers analyze high-resolution imagery from something called magnetoencephalography, or MEG, scanner, along with information on each woman's cognitive abilities, language skills, and genetics.

So far, more than 100 women, age 30 to 100, have had their brains scanned in the privately funded Minnesota Women's Healthy Aging Project study. Researchers are recruiting women of all ages and plan to re-examine them each year.

"I was always bothered by the fact that you can do a check up on every organ from kidneys to lungs to heart to muscles and nothing like that exists for the brain," **Georgopoulos** said. "I'm in neuroscience. I'm a physician by training, so I'm very interested in human disease and it's obvious we need that. But these days you study the brain only if you have a problem, so the idea of a healthy check up for your brain doesn't exist."

The MEG is a long white machine that's rounded at the bottom. There are only a few like it in the world. Subjects lie on a bed with their heads inside one end of the MEG as it take snapshots of the brain as it relays thousands of signals. "The MEG records magnetic fields that are generated by ions — charged molecules, sodium and potassium mainly and calcium — going through synaptic membranes, and this is the essence of brain communication," **Georgopoulos** said.

Unlike other brain imaging tools, the MEG quickly takes an undistorted, highly detailed image of brain activity. "Push a button, retain the data. Push a button, finished," **Georgopoulos** said. "The whole thing takes a minute."



**Dr. Powell**

The study is important because not much is known about the healthy brain, said **Dr. Deborah Powell**, dean emerita of the University of Minnesota Medical School.

"Why do two different people with family histories of Alzheimer's does one develop it and one doesn't? What are the early changes that one can see with some of these techniques that we know nothing about yet?" Powell said. "Do we have to wait until somebody begins to show overt symptoms of progressive memory loss or is there a subtler clue that we could pick up if we could do some of these scans earlier, and we just don't know that."

The study is a partnership between the VA and the University of Minnesota. Although the study is not intended to find out anything about the brains of veterans in particular, all of the participants are military veterans.

**Jane Clark**, 57, of St. Paul served in the Navy in the 1970s and and1980s and now has a civilian job at the VA. She volunteered to have her brain scanned to help advance medical science. She also hopes the study will benefit younger military veterans who suffer combat-related brain injuries. "They are using more explosives and these poor young folks are inside these vehicles and it's doing a lot of damage to their brains," **Clark** said. "The better we can help those young folks coming back from that war, I'm for it."

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**Dr. Georgopoulos**



## STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS



VISN23 and the Minneapolis VA homeless outreach team have been honored with the VA Secretary's Award for Outstanding Achievement. Receiving the award (l-r): Caitlin Powers, Margaret Neuman, Rebecca Kneip (back), Bridgette Jackelen, Leah Skrivseth, Barb Brehmer, Jonelle Draughn, Larisa Breid, Katie Smith (back), Elizabeth Rezek, Marcella Godfrey (back), Daniel Corvin and Barry Sharp, Acting Director.

- Recommended for Supervisor of the Year: **Lori Baier, Janet Crowder, Chris Erickson, Rita Fogarty, Theresa Leshner, Majorie Masley, Dr. J. Riley McCarten, Paula Newinski, Jeanne Porrazzo-Carroll, Karl Reid, Jennifer Reinardy, Pam Russell-Demaster, Kevin Upham and Theresa Weber.** Dr. Mike Armstrong was named Supervisor of the Year (see Story Page 1).
- **Nina Sayer**, MA, PhD, clinical psychologist and health services researcher and Associate Director for the Center for Chronic Disease Outcomes Research (CCDOR), participated in media round table with national medical and military reporters on Feb. 16. The roundtable was sponsored by the VA Office of Research and Development.



Lavelle

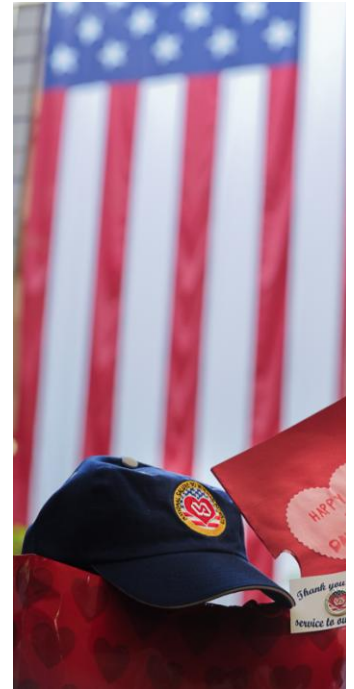
- The new chief of environmental services is **Jackie Lavelle**, who previously worked at the Omaha-Western Iowa VA. Ms. Lavelle replaces Gene House, who retired in 2011.
- The new Administrative Officer (AO) for the Education Service is **Nicole Warren**, who previously worked for four and one-half years as an accountant in the Finance Department. She replaces **Endia Porter**, who is now the AO for the Primary Care PSL.
- **Stacy Tepper**, social worker with the polytrauma program, has been honored as recipient of the Minneapolis VA Hands and Heart Award. In a letter from Robert Petzel, M.D., Under Secretary for Health, she was called "a compassionate individual whose dedication to Veterans is marked by the highest standards in patient care." She is pictured at right receiving the commendation from Barry Sharp, acting director, of the Minneapolis VA, at the medical center leadership meeting on Feb. 16.



Sharp (l) and Tepper



# VA Salute to Veterans 2012



*Veteran service organizations, aides to congressional leaders, beauty queens, VA staff and friends of the Minneapolis VA participated in the annual Salute to Veterans on Feb. 14. Following a brief ceremony in the flag atrium, the visitors and special guests visited patients throughout the hospital, delivering commemorative caps and Valentine's Day cards prepared by area school children. Thanks to a donation by the Military Order of the Purple Heart, inpatients were served a special meal that included Prime Rib. Pictured below are veterans Andrew Godbois (l) and David Gustafson (with meal)*







## JOIN US FOR A 2K WALK + ROLL

TO BENEFIT HOMELESS VETERANS AND  
PROMOTE HEALTH + WELLNESS

# MAY 16, 2012



### MISSION REDEFINED: **BLUE TO BLACK DIAMOND** APRIL 22-27 • ARAPAHOE BASIN SKI AREA • KEystone, COLORADO

Want to take your skiing to the next level? Learn how at the VA advanced ski clinic. This five-day event for disabled Veterans and disabled members of the Armed Forces will give you the confidence, tools and guidance to become a stronger skier.

U.S. Paralympians Heath Calhoun (U.S. Army, ret.) and Chris Devlin-Young (U.S. Coast Guard, ret.), along with coaches from the U.S. Paralympics Alpine Skiing National Team will host the clinic.

All skiers must be fully independent skiers, able to get into their equipment, load the lift independently, and get up after a fall unassisted.

Apply soon, as limited space is available. For more information, contact Kevin Jardine at (719) 332-8640 or [kevin.jardine@usoc.org](mailto:kevin.jardine@usoc.org).



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs



*Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans invites you to participate in a free:*

## DROP-IN LEGAL CLINIC FOR VETERANS

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1 Veterans Drive | Minneapolis, MN  
FREE Parking at the VA Medical Center

Attorneys, MACV staff, County Veterans Service Officers, child support officers and VA Mental Health Homeless Program intake available throughout the day to assist veterans with questions, legal forms and counsel.

For more information contact:  
Sara Sommarstrom, MACV - 651.224.0292 | [ssommarstrom@mac-v.org](mailto:ssommarstrom@mac-v.org)



# No Veteran should be homeless

Call 1-877-4AID VET to help yourself or someone in need.